

Workshop 3 notes

‘Turning the tables on the state’ Achieving human & social rights in the 21st century

Saturday, 11 March

The main messages that came out of Group 3 were:

- Rights are encapsulated by determination of individuals in history to have some say in society.
- Do we have institutions available today to preserve our rights?
- To what extent is the state a commercial institution?
- Accountability of the state is a major issue. Historical lessons in what happens when the state is alienated.
- Rights are not “given” – they must be “won”.
- Participatory democracies in e.g. Porto Allegro, Brazil, could show a way forward. Essentially people in favelas being consulted about their own participation.
- The process of voting, which is supposed to involve you in self-governance, does not go far enough.
- Need for democratic spaces e.g. City Hall, has been overcome by the need for making profit. Deficit of democratic spaces.
- What should the aims of government be?
- We have been “disenfranchised” by the lack of power in our votes.
- Decisions that affect the course of this country are taken by, e.g. the World Trade Organisation (an unelected body)
- Problem is that while some issues are global, within countries and parts of countries, institutions vary.
- The Greater London Authority (GLA), for example, which purports to be about self-government, has no power.
- The question of responsibility – e.g. the creation of co-operative movement.
- Seize opportunities for “issue” campaigning. e.g. climate change.

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Summary

1. European Charter of Social Rights – use this as a campaign focus. Try to get it ratified.
2. Elaborate some new political institutions. Campaign of civil disobedience on ID Cards
3. Establish a “peoples’ assembly” for e.g. London, to act as a “third leg of government”
4. Still a big question – how do we challenge the status quo?
5. Fight apathy to create a new constitution.